

On Gender Identity and Marriage

Men and women are different.

This self-evident and clichéd claim is no longer as uncontroversial as, historically, it would have been. According to the American Psychological Association, “Gender identity refers to a person’s internal sense of being male, female, or something else; gender expression refers to the way a person communicates gender identity to others through behavior, clothing, hairstyles, voice, or body characteristics. ... Transgender people experience their transgender identity in a variety of ways and may become aware of their transgender identity at any age.”

This statement, which includes a reference to an undefined but apparently defining “internal sense” and the concurrent argument that one can recognize his or her transgenderism “at any age,” has stunning implications for the way law, society and family all function.

So, what’s the deal with exclusively male-female unions?

Human biology and physiology make it plain that men and women are to mate and reproduce. This is a self-evident claim; no explanation of such things as heterosexual intercourse, conception or birth is necessary to vindicate it. Such manipulations of the reproductive process as heterosexual surrogacy and physician-conducted implantation of sperm from two male partners into a single womb only make the point that the natural sexual relationship is inherently heterosexual.

As Dr. Andreas Kostenberger observes in his Family Research Council (FRC) booklet “The Bible’s Teaching on Marriage and the Family,” “Marriage is a covenant, a sacred bond between a man and a woman instituted by and publicly entered into before

God and normally consummated by sexual intercourse.”

FRC’s senior fellow for policy studies, Peter Sprigg, makes a similar but more specific case: “Marriage has always been defined as a male-female union for two simple reasons: Society needs children, and a child needs a mom and a dad. Only the union of a man and a woman can naturally produce a child, and the marriage of a man and a woman is what is most likely to provide a child with a stable home shared with both the child’s mother and father.”

Yet procreation is only one side of the marriage coin. Complementarity is the other.

Organizations like Freedom to Marry, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and the Human Rights Campaign argue that same-sex marriage is a matter of justice: If two same-sex partners (1) love one another romantically and (2) volitionally choose to wed, there should be no legal impediments to their doing so. They assert that such impediments imply some combination of ignorance, religious bigotry or sheer homophobia.

The claim of injustice is itself unjust. Because people want to do something that does not adversely affect those immediately around them (e.g., neighbors or co-workers), that does not mean they should be allowed to do so. Society is organic and, thus, so is harm. Same-sex unions do not threaten any healthy natural marriage, but rather they threaten the institution of marriage and, thereby, the well-being of countless families.

Similarly, we have laws against myriad “victimless” crimes (substance abuse, prostitution, etc.) not only because they harm individuals who engage in them but also because they degrade society. Consensual homosexual unions might cause no apparent distress to persons proximate to them, but they diminish an institution—marriage—without which civilization

will erode ever more quickly. And in case one hasn't noticed, natural marriage in the United States is in enough trouble as it is.

Additionally, it is noteworthy that if affection and consent are the only criteria for a marital relationship, then logically any kind of consensual union should be permissible. This opens the door to polygamy, polyamory, polyandry and other types of marital relationships. This is not an aspersive comment but an obvious deduction.

The clear teaching of Judaism and Christianity is that the only divinely sanctioned sexually intimate relationship is that which exists between a man and a woman within the covenant of marriage. This means all other sexual unions, heterosexual and homosexual, are prohibited. (See, for example, "Leviticus, Jesus and Homosexuality: Some Thoughts on Honest Interpretation.")

No one is required to accept this belief; religious liberty is foundational to the American republic. However, when those who advocate for same-sex "marriage" claim an umbrella of biblical support, they are upholding a chimera.

Sociologist David Popenoe, of Rutgers University, in his classic book *Life Without Father*, underscores why children need both a mom and a dad: "The complementarity of male and female parenting styles is striking and of enormous importance to a child's overall development ... fathers express more concern for the child's long-term development, while mothers focus on the child's immediate well-being. ... While mothers provide an important flexibility and sympathy in their discipline, fathers provide ultimate predictability and consistency. Both dimensions are critical for an efficient, balanced, and humane childrearing regime."

This is an eloquent restatement of the folk wisdom that has governed family life for millennia, also known as common

sense. It no longer has the cultural purchase it once did, but it should.

So what, then, must we do? As Christians, our job is not only to advocate for natural marriage personally and politically, legislatively and in litigation, but to model it. Are we?

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